CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.773
7 August 1997

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-THIRD PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 7 August 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mrs. Krasnohorská (Slovakia)

GE.97-63786 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 773rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

On my list of speakers for today I have the representatives of the Netherlands and Cameroon, as well as the representative of Nigeria, who will address the Conference in his capacity as Coordinator of the Group of 21.

As you know, the representative of the Netherlands, Ambassador Jaap Ramaker, is about to leave this Conference, having been called by his Government to perform other duties. Ambassador Ramaker has represented his country in this Conference for three years, which I think I may describe as full and productive. His personal contribution to the drawing up of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty has rightly been acknowledged by all of us. The talent and skill with which he chaired the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban's Working Group on Legal and Institutional Issues in 1995, and the energy and patience with which he chaired the Ad Hoc Committee last year during the final phase of the negotiations, are a source of inspiration for all of us in our common striving towards the establishment of a world of peace and stability. Accordingly, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, I would like to wish Ambassador Ramaker and his family much success and happiness in their new life.

I invite Ambassador Ramaker to take the floor.

Mr. RAMAKER (Netherlands): Lately, it has become fashionable in this Conference to try and find common ground also in the course of formal plenary sessions. So it was on one of these occasions, just before our summer break, that I already had an opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for the way in which you, Madam President, try to steer us into safer waters. May I repeat this today and add how much impressed I am with the dignity with which you perform, unfortunately at this moment, a seemingly thankless task.

A warm word of welcome to our new colleagues, Ambassador Javier Illanes of Chile and the neighbour to my left, Ambassador Clive Pearson of New Zealand, who cannot be here today. Welcoming new colleagues in a farewell speech strikes me as symbolic for the continuity of this Conference. I wish both well in their future tasks.

As I am about to leave Geneva, allow me to make a few personal observations on the present state of affairs in this Conference, a Conference which has so much contributed to making this world a somewhat safer place to live in. For almost one and a half decades I have been participating in, or have been following from more or less a distance, the events in this Conference. My baptism as a multilateral diplomat took place here in this very hall, in the early eighties, roughly where my friend and colleague Antonio de Icaza is sitting right now (although at the time I was not sitting in the driver's seat as he is now). Different times were those. The cold war was at its height in 1983, or so it seemed, and of course we, here in the CD - what else is new? - had a cold war of our own. Little did we know then, in those years of fruitless, all too often bitter recriminations, by the way largely gone unnoticed in "the real world", that the time of great opportunities for that "single multilateral negotiating body" we were working in was around the corner. Did I just say fruitless? Maybe on the face of it,

(Mr. Ramaker, Netherlands)

but already then, despite the seeming paralysis prevailing in the Conference in those days, some important foundations were laid for the great results we have reached in this Conference since then. I feel immensely privileged that I was given the chance to be instrumental in helping shape one of these results, the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, last year, in the middle of my second stay in Geneva.

It should come as no surprise that after such a long period of direct or indirect involvement and interest in CD matters I am leaving this Conference with the proverbial mixed feelings. While I am looking forward to my new responsibilities in New York, I regret having to leave so many colleagues and friends, whose qualities, both human and professional, have made my work here in Geneva, trying as it was at times, at the same time such a tremendous pleasure.

In my view, the Conference on Disarmament, after the remarkable successes reached this decade, finds itself, at least thus far, in a period of reorientation rather than in one of real crisis. With the benefit of memory that goes back to the early 1980s - an asset I share with a few others present here today - may I offer some, as I said, personal reflections on the CD, on what it stands for or ought to stand for, on what it ought to do or at any rate reasonably can do? And in order not to take up too much of our time this morning, let me do so in a number of points that I will try to formulate as concisely as possible.

First, it seems to me important to reiterate what seems to be at first sight the obvious: this Conference is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is a vehicle, not the road itself. But what is important here to note is that the spare parts, so to speak, the delegates, over the years have changed all the time, while the vehicle remained in running condition. It could start and drive off at any moment. Even in periods of seeming inactivity - and this year is not unique; the CD had quite a few of them in the past, I can assure you - skills and expertise were handed over from generation to generation of delegates. This kept the vehicle in mint condition so that it could be used at any time, when the conditions were there.

Second, it is worth while pointing out, it seems to me, that amongst the many vehicles of multilateral diplomacy, the CD, I think, is a real limousine. Those here in this room who are in a better position to judge than I have been these past few years tell us that, in fact, this Conference is the best club in town, an opinion widely shared not only amongst ourselves, of course, but by many a restaurant of good reputation in Geneva and its attractive vicinities.

Third, in comparing the Conference to a club, a club comprising, by the way, both members and observers, let me emphasize that this club character, or rather this club atmosphere, is one of the lesser known reasons for its successes. With an increased and, in due course, further increasing membership - and let me take this opportunity to wish the newly appointed Special Coordinator, Ambassador Kreid of Austria, success in his difficult task - it is and will be important to maintain the essence of the idea of a club, of the "esprit de corps" if you wish, and the work ethos it stands for.

(Mr. Ramaker, Netherlands)

While our capitals at times may be bewildered on what is going on in the Conference, thus it is that we as club members do not panic: we know better.

Fourth, all of this to say, and this on a more serious note, that in a period like the CD is going through at the moment, we should guard against jumping to hasty conclusions as to the vehicle itself. In my view, it has still all the potential to serve us well in further multilateral disarmament efforts.

Fifth, and let me drop these not so original metaphors of vehicles and clubs, time has come, in my view, to thoroughly reflect, once again, on the meaning of the notion "the single multilateral negotiating forum in the field of disarmament", which traditionally describes the CD. Disarmament efforts go on elsewhere in the world. The CD, for the first time in its history, even encounters some form of competition. Last month, the Secretary-General of the United Nations presented his reform package to the Member States. While the Secretary-General limited his proposals to his sphere of competence, it is, in my view, clear that the intergovernmental bodies will have to follow suit. And this Conference is no exception. Like other forums, it will have to take into account a changed and continuously changing world. I welcome the fact that not only once again a Special Coordinator for the agenda could be appointed, but also one for improved and effective functioning. I sincerely hope that my Hungarian and Egyptian colleagues will be able to reach some meaningful results.

Sixth, it has been some years now since the last of the Group of Wise Men, but also the last Group of Wise Men thus far, which was formed in the CD towards the end of the 1980s, left Geneva. In the absence, or - who knows? - maybe the temporary absence, of such a group Ambassador Zahran and Ambassador Náray may give a broad interpretation to their tasks. But in the last analysis it is not procedures or methods of work, although some improvements could, of course, be made here, but, rather, differences on the substance of our security policies that very often if not always prevent us from making substantive progress. While no mechanism or forum in this area of human endeavour is more representative than is the CD, an in-depth reflection of the immediate and longer-term possibilities and impossibilities of this Conference in the new security environment of today's world seems in order. So is there maybe room for another, informal of course, group of wise men and women?

Seventh, in the meantime, a number of thoughts occur to me of what could be kept in mind in the CD's proceedings. They could help smooth the path, I hope; none of them entails any change in formal rules.

One is that, while essentially a negotiating body, the CD cannot always but negotiate. Spoiled as our capitals are in these, for the CD, so productive 1990s, they should not forget that the most recent products of the Conference, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, were preceded by years and years, even decades, of preparation. So negotiating does not exclude - on the contrary I would say - exploratory work. I am happy to note that my Australian colleague, John Campbell is at present

exploring the possibilities of starting work on anti-personnel landmines in this Conference. I wish him every success. Of course, it should not take years of preparation this time.

Another one is the all too often overlooked fact that, yes, delegations have their instructions, but, yes, apart from interpreting them in their own way, they contribute themselves in shaping them in their contacts with their capitals. It is worth while reminding ourselves, under the present circumstances in the CD, that delegates, therefore, notwithstanding their instructions, do have their own individual responsibility for the well-being of the Conference as well.

The Conference would be well advised, in my view, furthermore, not to encroach too often or too much on the traditionally existing prerogatives of the President. He or she should have the freedom to organize the necessary consultations as he or she sees fit. Consultations to reach consensus on how to consult carries both the consultation process and, for that matter, the rule of consensus, it seems to me, to the absurd.

Presidents in office, finally, might consider to keep their immediate predecessor and successor closely associated with their own entire consultation process. This would serve, in my view, the continuity which is especially important as the annual session of the Conference draws to a close.

Earlier in my statement, I already mentioned how privileged I felt that I could bring many years of work aimed at the conclusion of a Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty at long last to a successful conclusion. I look back on a few years of incredibly hard, but at the same time challenging, work. Not only here in this Conference: in 1995, in the Chair of one of the two working groups the test ban negotiations had divided themselves in, as you mentioned this morning, but also in New York in the Chair of one of the main committees of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. Nothing can ever equal the eventful year of 1996. While I am grateful and touched by what you said a few moments ago about the role of my delegation and myself in bringing about the CTBT, that result could never have been obtained were it not for a number of reasons: a strong desire on the part of individuals and Governments all over the world to put a definitive end to nuclear testing, a remnant of, in the eyes of many, a quickly fading past, together with the tremendous efforts exerted by delegations present in this room, to name just the most important ones.

In a few days I will have left Geneva and I am fully aware that here in the CD I leave more behind than simply friends. Comrades-in-arms, strange as it may sound in a disarmament body, is maybe a better term, but then a term not used in the usual sense of the word. We were not on the same side of a battle line, as comrades-in-arms usually are, but on different sides of many different battle lines. Isn't that after all the essence of multilateral diplomacy? But comrades we remained nevertheless.

In conclusion, let me thank you yourself, Madam President, and all of my colleagues for their friendship and cooperation. My gratitude extends to our Secretary-General, Vladimir Petrovsky, to his deputy, Abdelkader Bensmail, and the entire staff of the secretariat. A particular word of thanks also should

go to Mrs. Jennifer Mackby, who assisted my delegation and me in an invaluable manner during the CTBT negotiations over the last few years. She cannot be with us today because she devotes her expertise these weeks in Vienna precisely to the PrepCom on CTBT. I also sincerely thank our highly qualified interpreters, who waged their own battle with the language we used (and I apologize, in passing, to the English language), and the rest of the United Nations staff who on more than one occasion not only helped me but encouraged me in my efforts last year.

Mr. NGOUBEYOU (Cameroon) (translated from French): Madam President, it is a great pleasure for my delegation and myself to pay tribute to you for the elegant and courteous way in which you have guided the work of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) during this particularly difficult period in its activities. We would like to express our gratitude to your predecessors for the wonderful job they did in trying to achieve the goals and noble ideals of the Conference on Disarmament.

Despite the fact that the general feeling prevailing today among the members of the Conference on Disarmament in particular and the international community in general seems to be disappointment, not to say frustration, due to the inability of member States to reach agreement on a definitive programme of work this year, there remain many reasons for pride and satisfaction for the Conference on Disarmament, reasons which allow us to view the future with a degree of optimism. Inter alia the Conference on Disarmament has successfully concluded, in conditions similar to those we are encountering today, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), as well as the agreement on the expansion of its membership.

Just before the suspension of our work after the second part of the session of the Conference, we agreed to appoint four special coordinators to consider the agenda, anti-personnel landmines, expansion and the improved functioning of the Conference on Disarmament. However small these achievements may seem, they do illustrate the will and determination of the members of the CD to continue the search for adequate solutions to the disarmament problems challenging the world today. My delegation undertakes to contribute as far as its modest capabilities permit towards achieving these goals. This is why since the beginning of this year we have worked in a spirit of active solidarity with all the members of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and in particular with the Group of 21 to put forward proposals which we feel are not only important but necessary if progress is to be made in the work of the CD. And it is in the light of all the above that we fully supported the proposals of the Group of 21 on the programme of work of the CD, as contained in document CD/1462, as well as the proposals of 26 countries from the Group of 21 contained in CD/1463 with regard to the mandate for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. Today, as far as my delegation is concerned, these proposals are still just as relevant as they were yesterday. My delegation continues to believe that nuclear disarmament is of paramount importance to the existence of mankind and therefore remains a priority issue for the Conference on Disarmament (CD).

My delegation also supports the view that the question of anti-personnel landmines also merits very careful consideration. The very fact that this

(Mr. Ngoubeyou, Cameroon)

category of weapons causes indiscriminate killing among the civilian and military population places it at the centre of both humanitarian and disarmament concerns. From that standpoint my delegation is prepared to discuss this problem both outside and within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament (CD). This is why my delegation is one of those which are involved in the Ottawa Process and hope that the Conference on Disarmament will take up the efforts undertaken in that process and complement and reinforce them.

My country is one of the new members of the CD. My delegation reiterates its gratitude to all the member States which worked tirelessly for years for the expansion of the CD, an expansion which finally bore fruit last year with the admission of a few new members, including my country. As we have had occasion to declare earlier, my delegation believes that if the Conference on Disarmament is a forum for the international multilateral negotiation of treaties with universal application, its membership should reflect that objective. Thus my delegation will continue its efforts to promote this expansion of the CD while awaiting the report of the Special Coordinator on this item.

In order to achieve greater efficiency, it is important for the Conference on Disarmament to streamline both its agenda and its programme of work so as to allow delegations to play an effective part in each phase of the negotiations. In their present state the agenda and the programme of work of the CD are in our humble opinion more than overloaded.

To conclude, my delegation is pleased to note that despite everything, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) has already achieved enormous and substantial progress towards a gradual but effective disarmament process. However, there is still a long road to travel, with many obstacles along the way. We must not be disheartened. On the contrary, we must commit ourselves, with the future generation, to promoting the goals and principles of building a world free of all weapons of mass destruction and indiscriminate slaughter. To this end, Madam, you can rely on my delegation.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Cameroon for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria, Ambassador Abuah.

Mr. ABUAH (Nigeria): I have asked for the floor to make a statement on behalf of the Group of 21, which I have the honour to represent as its current Coordinator. However, before I do so, let me convey to you, Madam, the felicitations of the Nigerian delegation for the skills you are continually applying in the conduct of business of this Conference under very difficult circumstances. Your immediate predecessor, the distinguished Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Absa Claude Diallo, equally gave of her best to resolve the present problems of the Conference. Yet, in no small measure, these problems still remain. This is why I have been directed by the Group of 21 to make the following statement on its behalf.

The Group of 21 attaches the highest priority to the issue of nuclear disarmament, which has been determined by the international community as the most important item on the disarmament agenda. To this end, on 5 June 1997,

(Mr. Abuah, Nigeria)

the Group submitted the proposal contained in document CD/1462 which called for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. The Group of 21 regrets that this proposal was rejected out of hand by certain delegations as inappropriate. That was only a setback which in our view does not affect the commitment of the Group on its proposal on nuclear disarmament. The Group of 21 continues to attach the highest priority to the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament.

In the context of its proposals contained in the document on the question, namely CD/1462, the Group of 21 recalls its suggestion for the re-establishment of ad hoc committees on the prevention of an arms race in outer space and effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. In this regard, the Group of 21 notes that certain delegations in the Conference on Disarmament had asked for time to obtain instructions from their competent authorities, hopefully, in the view of the Group of 21, to allow for the re-establishment of these two committees. The Group would now wish to be able to benefit from these instructions, which should have been received by now, so that work on these committees can go forward.

Regarding the work of the special coordinators on expansion of the CD, agenda of the CD, improved and effective functioning of the CD and the question of anti-personnel landmines, the Group commits itself to continue to cooperate with the coordinators. In this context, the Group urges the special coordinators to consult widely, in a transparent manner, on the range of issues involved. To this end, the Group commends the manner in which the consultations by the Special Coordinator on improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament have been conducted, and urges this approach for consideration by the other coordinators.

It is the hope of the Group of 21 that the special coordinators should conclude their work early so that consideration of their reports in the Conference could be undertaken as expeditiously as possible.

This completes the statement of the Group of 21, but while I still have the floor, may I beg your indulgence. Let me say goodbye to my colleague to the right, Ambassador Ramaker, a fine diplomat. Let me also welcome our colleagues who have joined the Conference.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Nigeria for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I have no more speakers today. Would any other delegations like to take the floor at this stage? I give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh): We have heard yet another valedictory statement today. In the last plenary meeting we welcomed new colleagues. This gives us a sense of continuous movement and change. Sadly, though, this movement and change is not necessarily matched by movement and change in our work.

Rich tributes are truly owed to Ambassador Ramaker. His remarks today display a few sparks of the firmament of which his intellect is made. If the CD had a hall of fame, a niche for him would be ensured. Praising him also

(Mr. Chowdhury, Bangladesh)

gives me particular pleasure as his country, the Netherlands, and mine, Bangladesh, have been cooperating across a broad spectrum, from disarmament to development. We, however, draw some satisfaction from the belief that old CD Ambassadors, like old soldiers, never die. But unlike old soldiers, they do not fade away. Happily, they simply relocate to continue their contribution.

Bangladesh would underscore our total support for the G-21 position as very ably expressed by Ambassador Abuah of Nigeria. We also wish to record at the same time our deep disappointment with the lack of progress in the deliberations of the CD. We would like to make a fervent appeal to the membership to make every effort towards such progress. It is difficult to see how this can be achieved unless there is a spirit of give and take. The G-21 position reflects the apprehensions and the aspirations of an overwhelming majority of the global populace. These concerns should be taken seriously. Also, might I express our confidence that all of us in the G-21 are prepared to accommodate the genuine points that the other groups might raise? Countries like Bangladesh have a commitment towards disarmament that has only practical, and no ideological, content. In this specific case, we do not, for instance, see why, on prevention of an arms race in outer space and NSA, ad hoc committees cannot be established, pending or notwithstanding instructions. In the end, however, we will need to have consensus. This will reflect the kind of positive spirit that will help in other areas. No one is suggesting that anyone's security be compromised. We would like to see the CD proceed, with a respectful perception of one another's views, which is a sine qua non if we must move forward, and indeed we must.

Ambassador Ramaker compared us to a limousine. Of what good is a limousine if it is forever stalled?

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Bangladesh for his statement. Would any other delegations like to take the floor? Since none wish to do so, before adjourning this plenary meeting I would remind you that the Special Coordinator on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference, Ambassador Mounir Zahran of Egypt, will hold open-ended informal consultations on Tuesday, 12 August at 3 p.m. in this room. I would also like to inform you that Ambassador Náray of Hungary, the Special Coordinator on the review of the agenda of the Conference, intends to hold informal open-ended consultations next Thursday after the plenary. That announcement is subject to confirmation after Ambassador Náray's return. I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. ORFI (Syrian Arab Republic) (translated from Arabic): I requested the floor, Madam President, because I think that you were on the verge of adjourning or raising this meeting, although the Coordinator of the Group of 21 did inquire about the views of delegations which had asked for additional time to give their replies as regards the creation of an ad hoc committee on cessation of the arms race in space and an ad hoc committee on security assurances to countries which do not possess nuclear weapons. I think that this request should be seriously taken into account. It is a

(Mr. Orfi, Syrian Arab Republic)

request which represents half of the members of this forum. We still await the reply of the States which have asked for additional time to give their replies, and we have been waiting for more than a month.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement. Would any delegation like to reply to that question? I see none.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 14 August at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.